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Nicaragua: CIA enlisted two as spies

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MANAGUA, Nicaragua — The head of Nicaragua's state security agency charged yesterday that the CIA recruited two Nicaraguan Interior Ministry officers to spy for the United States as part of a growing U.S. infiltration.

During a news conference, state security director Lenin Cerna Juarez laid out a partial history of alleged CIA contacts in Miami with one young Nicaraguan officer, and his subsequent spying.

The accuracy of the information Cerna presented was impossible to confirm immediately. Reporters at the news conference were not even allowed to question the principal officer in the alleged plot. The other officer was not present.

Cerna contended that CIA agents assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Managua coordinated the operation and named two U.S. diplomats as the officers' contacts. The diplomats he named are First Secretary Stephen Murchinson, 43, a senior political officer, and Third Secretary Bonnie Sue Bennett, 26, a junior consular officer.

A U.S. Embassy spokesman in Managua, John Roney, said after the news conference that "as a matter of policy, we do not comment on intelligence matters or alleged intelligence activities."

Roney said he had no knowledge of any moves by the Nicaraguan government to expel Murchinson or Bennett. Asked whether there was U.S. concern for the diplomats' security, Roney said the embassy assumed that "the Nicaraguan government will maintain its responsibility to protect diplomatic personnel."

During the news conference, the principal Nicaraguan officer accused of espionage, 2d Lt. Reynaldo Aguado Montealegre, limped to a chair next to Cerna and told reporters that a brother's phone call telling him that his mother was dying of cancer lured him to Miami in October.

When he arrived in Miami, Aguado said, he was approached by a CIA agent who hinted that he would let local anti-Sandinista rebels loose on his family if he declined the offer of employment as a spy for U.S. government. That employment, he said, included deposits of \$25,500 to start and \$5,500 a month in a Miami bank account.

Aguado and Cerna said that Aguado returned to Managua and began poking around, equipped with a \$25,000 camera concealed as a Cricket cigarette lighter, invisible-ink carbon paper for sending secret messages, radio code books and miniature instructions rolled up inside a Bic pen.

Aguado was detected in January and arrested last month, they said.

Cerna said the CIA also had recruited Interior Ministry 2d Lt. Jose Eduardo Trejos Silva in November 1983 and used him to spy with help from his wife, Rosalina Soza. Cerna said the couple was discovered in mid-1985 and detained Feb. 19.

The two were not presented to reporters yesterday, Cerna said, because the ministry was interested only in giving an overview of the alleged espionage. But he said the couple would be made available to reporters later.

Elsewhere in the region, U.S. special envoy Philip C. Habib arrived yesterday in Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras, for talks with that country's officials.

Habib repeated the Reagan administration's offer to resume direct talks with Nicaragua if the Sandinista government would agree to talk with the U.S.-backed contras. The Nicaraguan government has repeatedly rejected that proposal.